



# 147<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Derby

## Presented by Woodford Reserve

Post-Race News Conference

Saturday, May 1, 2021  
Churchill Downs



**JIM MULVIHILL:** Congratulations to Medina Spirit, winner of Kentucky Derby 147. And we are happy to be joined by winning jockey, John Velazquez, and owner, Amr Zedan. Congratulations to you both. Johnny, this is your fourth Kentucky Derby win. You become the first jockey since Calvin Borel to win the Oaks and Derby on the same weekend. Calvin did it in 2009. Just an incredible weekend for you.

First, we would appreciate it if you would take us through the race.

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** We talked about this. I liked this little horse. I know he's all heart. Strategy was very simple -- break out of there and try to put him in the lead. If somebody wanted to go him faster than me, let him have it. I know we were quick. And the more I looked at the race, the more I studied the race, I knew he was faster than the rest of the horses. And especially the way he breaks out of the gate. And talking to Bob, listen, the whole team, what a great job to keep this horse going the way he's done. I knew he was going to be a fighter. I rode him twice before, and he fought for second for every step of the way.

And the horses who won in Santa Anita in a fast track -- so everybody kind of got off of him. They didn't like him. He run some really good races at Santa Anita. Like I said, I didn't lose hope in him. I liked him. I love everything he did, and he showed up today.

**JIM MULVIHILL:** Can you just tell us a little more detail from, say the 1/4 pole home, especially the fight that he showed?

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Like I said, I know he's a fighter. Those two races he run in California, he got hooked from the 3/8 pole home and he fought. The other two horses won very easily on the lead. And it doesn't seem like he didn't run a good race. He did. I know he was going to fight anybody who come to him, and he did today.

Every time I asked him for more, he kept going more and more. That's all you ask for a horse. When you ride a horse like this, they fight and they are competitive, you can't ask for anything else.

**JIM MULVIHILL:** Amr Zedan, you set out in horse racing five years ago with the goal of winning the Kentucky Derby. Amazing it would come together like this. Can you just share your emotions over the last half-hour.

**AMR ZEDAN:** This is really surreal. I really just can't believe it. I was watching the race from down there. And obviously a lot of people here. You can't really see.



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So what I was hoping is exactly what Johnny said. I was just hoping for a clean break. We got the eight hole. I knew he had a heart that's bigger than his body. And all we needed is for him to be up front and just keep fighting because no one was going to pass Medina if Medina really got the lead.

On the way into the stretch, I just couldn't see anything. It just went gray, and all of a sudden everybody is jumping on top of me. I don't know. It was emotional. It was surreal. It was just amazing.

**JIM MULVIHILL:** Johnny, you did ride him in his last two starts going out to California. Of course, you were here last September to win the Derby on Authentic. Can you talk about the relationship with Bob and going out to California to ride this horse and getting this mount.

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Obviously, I'm very glad. Not just glad, very thankful for the opportunity Bob has given me. This opportunity doesn't come very often for a man like me, the age that I am right now.

**BOB BAFFERT:** How about me? (laughter)

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Bob has given the opportunity. 49 years old and to think that getting this opportunity at this age, it doesn't happen in this business. So I'm very grateful and very thankful for the opportunity. That's what keeps me hungry. I think I do a good job in what I do. And he has given me the option to stay around and ride these kind of horses.

**JIM MULVIHILL:** Bob Baffert, thanks for joining us.

**BOB BAFFERT:** Well, I'm still -- I'm just -- this is one of the biggest Derby wins. Usually when I come in here, I feel like if I don't win -- I bring in these heavy-duty horses.

This year I really enjoyed myself. I came in here under the radar. I thought, well, maybe he'll get a piece of it or something. But Johnny, he kept telling me if he improves off his last race, he'll run well.

And Ron Anderson, his agent, who is right there, he's really one of the sharpest. And he told me, he says, if he just improves two points on the sheet, he says, you can win this thing. Wow, well, if he's going to do that...

It's one of those things where it's just -- it was a thrilling win. And for this little horse, what he did today, he has got so much of Silver Charm in him, just a fighter. He put him on the lead and he was going along easy. And those horses came to him. I kept waiting for all those horses to pass him, you know? When they turned for home, I go, well...

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Don't say that (laughter).



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**BOB BAFFERT:** ...I think he's out of horse. And all of a sudden, I go, wait a minute, he's still...

We didn't start rooting yet. When we got to about the 1/8 pole, we thought, This guy has got a shot. I felt bad because some of the connections with the other horses were around there, and we got pretty loud there. But it was just thrilling.

Usually you go in thinking, with a favorite or whatever, you expect to win it and you are just relieved. When [American] Pharoah won... Justify was like, Oh, we got through here.

But, today, this guy, he did it. He's so cool, such a professional. When you work with the guys like him, like the Mike Smiths, they're just so smart. They know every move. They know every horse, what they're going to do. He knew exactly what he was going to do.

I went to sleep last night, I didn't think how Johnny V (Velazquez) was going to ride him. I said, Look, you ride him. I don't care what you do. You know the horse really well now.

And here we are, and I'm just so excited.

And Amr [Zedan] here, I ran him into at an airport in Dubai on my way to the Saudi Cup. I'm going down, he says, "Hey, Bob," in the airport. It was him. We sat down there and we just talked for two hours while he was waiting for his flight. He said, I was thinking, maybe I'll get back in and maybe we can get together and win the Derby. And I go, Yeah, right, sure. (laughter)

**AMR ZEDAN:** That's true.

**BOB BAFFERT:** Then all of a sudden, he hooks up with Gary Young, the agent, top guy, and Taylor Made and Frank Taylor. He said, We're looking at horses. They find this little horse. We looked at him, hey, we liked him.

And all of a sudden, he's training. I have him down at my Los Alamitos. My assistant down there says, You know that horse they didn't give much for? I think he's okay. So we got him in. And sure enough, he broke his maiden.

But it's just been a Cinderella story. Even today, he was asking me: Can we light the board? I don't know. We might. You never know. That's what I love about this business. Nobody knows for sure.

But I'm just so grateful that I can still compete at this level. I have the clientele. I'm like Johnny, I'm getting older. As you get older, that window starts closing. You have to work harder at it. It's tougher.



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And I have got a lot of support. I have my beautiful wife, Jill, who supports me.

And, by the way, she won a race today.

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Congrats.

**BOB BAFFERT:** That was like winning the Derby. What she has to go through for my ups and downs, the highs and lows. And for her horse to win, that was the most greatest feeling. She felt like he felt winning the Derby. I mean, it's invigorating, excitement. Last hundred yards, I was just watching her during the race. It was so exciting.

And Jimmy Barnes, he's back. Nobody fell down. It was great.

As a matter of fact, he said, Should we put the flowers on the horse? Of course, we're going to put the flowers on this horse.

I'm just elated. I'm so fortunate. I cannot believe -- I never imagined last night I was going to be sitting here.

**JIM MULVIHILL:** We got a lot to cover with this horse. First off, can you just reflect a little bit more on a record-setting seven Kentucky Derbys and that achievement.

**BOB BAFFERT:** You know, it's one of those things where I've never been keeping score, like records and stuff. Like, the Grade I record, I heard about a month ago. It was a super jinx. And we got it today with Gamine.

But the seven wins, it's like, I can't believe I won two. It's just -- I leave here, like, wow. Can you believe it? Every time we've won, we look at each other, Jill and I: Can you believe we won the Kentucky Derby again? And it's exciting.

And I have my brother Bill here. My friend Karl Watson and little Bode. When you have your friends around you, it means a lot. And so it's one of those things where seven, whatever, it's just -- I don't think about things like that.

I was so fortunate. That means I was surrounded with great, great people. You can't win it without being surrounded by great assistants, gallop boys.

One of the exercise riders that came here, he was crying in the winner's circle. He could not believe it. "I have never been involved with a horse that he'd got on."



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It's that feeling, that dedication that we put in into this. As a trainer, you have to live it and breathe it. There's no vacations. There's no nothing. Jill knows.

But today, she got her vacation winning that turf race, and it was all worth it. It's moments like this that we live for, and it happened. My man, now what?

**Q. Bob, how far can you take this record? Seven and counting.**

**BOB BAFFERT:** Tom, I don't think about the records. I just want to be back with a horse that's competitive. The Kentucky Derby, there's other races, but the Derby is "the" race. Just to come here with a competitive horse, I thought we had a competitive horse.

I don't want to come here with an 80-1 shot. It's not really fun. And so I don't know -- I don't know. I didn't think I could hit five, two Triple Crowns. It's just like, whatever...

And then Mr. Positive here, "Don't worry, we're going to win it." I like that. I need somebody like that because I always go in -- I'm ready for that punch to the gut in this business. And so the highs and lows.

Eight? Whatever. I may never have another horse good enough for this, but we're not going to give up. And as long as the clients still want me -- I'm like Johnny, as long as they still want us, we're going to stay in there fighting away trying to win these things.

**JIM MULVIHILL:** I don't think you'll be needing new clients any time soon.

**Q. Johnny, four wins. Just elaborate on that. You have done something that a whole lot of jockeys are not able to do. You mentioned your age at 49. Talk about that.**

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** I got to keep saying I am blessed with the opportunities I have been given. I never thought in my wild dreams that I would win four Derbys. I'm also like Bob. I never look at numbers. Everybody always asks: Can you believe, Johnny, you are leading money-earner, and all this stuff. I never look at that. Or Grade I winner or most Grade I stakes winner, I never in my career looked at it like that. You can ask my wife.

Everybody asked me the same questions. It's not a thing for me. I just want to come and do my job. I want to come and do the best job I can do for the people that I'm working with.



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I take pride at what I do. I'm very blessed with the opportunities I've been given. And it works out. I think that's the way I always looked at it. I never looked at it and think to try to break records, or try to want anything like that. It was a job. I'm very proud about my job. I like to do really well, if I get the opportunity. And it has been a blessing. So that's the way I look at it.

**Q. How is the strategy any different than it was with Authentic last year going to the lead? And, Johnny, in particular for you, you haven't trailed in the Derby now in two years.**

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Well, I'll tell you what.

**BOB BAFFERT:** Don't tell him your secret.

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** It was a little bit different in the strategies, because the post position that we had today, it was a little more crucial than the one I had last time.

Even though we talked about it, Authentic probably was going to be in the lead, I had this feeling that the position that we had with Authentic, it was going to be compromised. Because something that happens almost eight out of ten horses, they don't break well from there, for whatever reason.

And, yes, we thought about going into the lead. I had the feeling if I break bad, I want to go to the lead gradually, instead of break bad and try to send and all of a sudden he's going 21 and then we have nothing to fight with. So those things, it comes to my head that I want to be prepared for those kind of things that if it does happen -- I don't know, maybe I'm just crazy, all the things that happen.

This one was much different. I got post position 8. I know I started the race really well. I know all the horses in the race. I only thought the one horse that was faster than me. It was the horse who was in the lead last time out in Santa Anita. But he was outside today. And I said, if I break well, I am going to try to outbreak him. If he needs to go faster than me, then he can go faster than me.

And it worked out good. My horse broke really well. I went right to the wire, the first time we go past the wire. I look outside, he's not there. Then the other horse I thought -- it was Soup and Sandwich that I was talking about. I rode him and I know he was going to be pretty fast. But I was already in my position. I was already where I wanted to be.

From then on, it's just different. All those things that happen, you anticipate things that can happen. So it's about strategizing, and hopefully the horse helps you to do those things.





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We cannot do anything without the horses. We can think everything we can. We can plan. We can do anything we want, but the horses have to help you. Very fortunate that the horses have done what we want to do.

### **Q. Bob, on going to the lead right away?**

**BOB BAFFERT:** We just talked about his best races -- when he ran -- it was the Robert Lewis, when he got out there and he went really fast, I said, when he goes out there fast in that race, and they turned for home and they came at him, he wouldn't let them pass and he fought them off.

When he came back -- we thought it was a really hard race on him. He came back and he wasn't really tired. He wasn't blowing hard. I said, You know what? He's got a good bottom to him.

Last time, he got behind and they went really, really fast. He's not a horse that really finishes -- he doesn't have like another gear. He's just steady. So Johnny, I said, he knows the horse now. I think he should run really well, and give him a chance. If you're turning for home and you're on the lead or something, maybe he'll give you the rest. And that's what he did.

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Bob sent me a text a week ago that says: Come out running and let him put up there. And I had not studied the race yet. And I texted him back and I said, Do you think we can be in the lead? He said just don't take a hold of him.

Then I studied the race really well. After I studied the race, Bob was 100% right. I said, you know what? We talked about it. The more I looked at it, Bob said, the horse may not break good anyway, so make sure you let him have it first.

Like you said, we plan all we can plan and anticipate things. The horse has to do the job as well. I'm only the pilot trying to do what we think is the best for the horse. And it worked out. We were very blessed, really.

### **Q. When you got into the deep stretch and it looked like it was getting a little dicey, did the horse give any impression to you that he was getting tired? And are you surprised, Bob, of the result?**

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** Do you want me to answer? No. I think I got more tired than he did. He was fighting. He was fighting for every bit of everything I asked him to do. He was fighting.



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I was so proud of him, because we got to the 1/16 pole and he keep putting the ears down and keep fighting. I think I was more tired than him because I kept riding much harder than he was going to. Like I said, I was not afraid. He was fighting.

**BOB BAFFERT:** I think I was more tired than he was riding the last 1/16th of a mile. I couldn't believe what was happening in front of my eyes. I thought he had a good chance, and then he was still there at the 1/4 pole. Well, he's still there. 1/8 pole, he's still there. 1/16 pole, he's really, really still there. You could tell he was just laying it down. Johnny was riding hard and those other horses -- he was just relentless. He was not going to let them -- he came back. He didn't seem like he was really that tired.

**Q. On the television, you talked about rehearsing your speech, and you ended up making comparisons between Bob and Picasso and Michelangelo. Was that part of the speech, or was that improvised? And could you elaborate on what you meant?**

**AMR ZEDAN:** That came from the heart, really. When you work with Bob -- and he doesn't need a compliment from me.

Bob, a lot of people at their job, it's kind of mechanical and it's a job. With Bob -- and that's why age is not a factor. Bob has a lot of years to go.

But with Bob, it's an art. It's gut. It's like Michelangelo, Pablo Picasso, it just comes out. It comes naturally. And you don't find that in people a lot, especially those who excel. You just can't be by coincidence a seven-time Derby winner. You can't win two Triple Crowns. It just doesn't happen.

I will just share two stories very quickly with you. We bought Princess Noor. She won a Grade I. And every horse we buy, Gary [Young] picks. We check out. And then Bob gives the final go-ahead.

So I was texting with Bob -- and we put a certain limit. She was an expensive filly. And I have the text. I'm going to frame it, actually, and give it to Bob. Bob texted me and says, I'm going to make her worth this much. And guess what? He pulled it off.

And when we met in Dubai -- this part he didn't mention -- we were sitting in the lounge. And I said, Bob, we want to win the Triple Crown, but we want to win the Kentucky Derby, and then probably see where we are, because we just don't have the horse yet.

And 15 months later, here we are. So what I meant with that is, with Bob, you're just witnessing art in motion. And I just can't thank him enough, really. It's been amazing. And as part of the rehearsal, yes, I've been speaking to myself about this speech, who to thank. It was just surreal. It's amazing.





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**JIM MULVIHILL:** Gary [Young] picks out the horses, but you actually had pretty extensive knowledge of Protonico and supported this purchase because of that relationship. Can you tell us about that.

**AMR ZEDAN:** With Protonico, Mr. Aboughazale, who's a dear friend -- he runs under Sumaya Silks -- and he owns Protonico. We were done shopping per se during the auction. And then Mr. Aboughazale calls me and says, Well, there's this horse by Protonico that I own the sire, and would you want to check him out? I said absolutely.

So I checked him out and I liked him. I called Gary [Young]. I said, Gary, what do you think? Let's run it by Bob [Baffert]. Bob gave the okay. So we looked at him, agrees everything was fine.

I was back home overseas. So Gary called me and says, do you want us to go for this horse? I said, well, Bob said yes, you say yes, let's do it. I said, Gary, I might be in an hour. Call me an hour when he goes into the ring. I miscalculated. And I was going to go in the shower.

Gary calls me literally two minutes later, says, Sir, he's going in the ring right now. Good thing I kept my phone right next to me. I said, Yeah, let's do it. And the rest is history. We just bought him and here we are.

**Q. Bob, I know they're all special, but when you think about everything surrounding this horse and the ups and downs of this game, is this one maybe a little bit more up the charts for you?**

**BOB BAFFERT:** Yeah, I mean, usually -- this is the Derby that -- my other Derbys, there were some I lost that I thought I couldn't lose.

But this is the only Derby I came in here thinking, I just don't know if we got the goods. We know he's solid, he's good, and he's tough. But everything's going to have to go really well to get it done. We have to have the trip. We know we had the jockey. He got away from there. I love Johnny [Velazquez] because he's so good away from the gate. He could have ridden for me at Los Alamitos Quarter Horses. He just lays the gate. That's what you need. I love guys that can just get a horse away from there.

But it was one of those things where it's almost like when we won with Abel Tasman, when we won the Oaks, we came in there thinking we don't know. She's last down the backside. Bode said, I guess we're going to eat at the sports bar tonight because she's not running well -- and then she wins. We were just elated. These wins -- the ones that we're in the Derby, we might have a chance.

I try to temper myself. I don't want to get too excited. I didn't want him to get too excited. Let's go in there. We're in the Derby. We'll just cruise on in there. Maybe we have a chance; maybe we don't. If



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we pull it off, then we say, Holy crap, what did we just do, you know? But that's what the Derby is all about.

The night before, every trainer, every owner thinks they're going to win the Kentucky Derby. It sounds like a crowded winner's circle. But, then, when the gates come open, the whole scenario changes. And we had the horse. He had the horse under him to pull it off. It's a team effort and I just -- he came through for us. He showed me today, hey, Bob, I'm a lot better than you think I am. And he's a hell of a lot better than I thought he was. And he's a really good horse. He's tough.

But his record, he runs first or second. I mean, his record, that's what you want coming into the Derby. He was first or second. But I just didn't want to be talking him up too much. I wanted to come in here and enjoy ourselves. And we had a great time, and here we go.

**Q. Back to the sales part of it, Bob, he was a relatively bargain deal for a 2-year-old, compared to what you're used to. Can you talk a little bit about how he made such a giant leap in less than a year, about the process, when you knew he was special, kind of when you had some idea of that.**

**BOB BAFFERT:** We knew once -- when he bought him, he worked really well at the sale. He worked really fast. And then he worked fast when I got him to Los Alamitos, started training him. He was training with other horses. My assistant down there, he told me, he acts like he could be a good horse.

But he doesn't really pay attention to what we gave for him or anything like that, my assistant there. And he'll tell me, he'll be frank with me, say, I don't know about this one. So when he tells me he could be a good one, he made the list. So we got him over and started training him. He won his first out. The good ones, they tip you off. So he was one of our good ones.

Same thing happened with Authentic. We had all these other good ones. But if they're good in the Bob Baffert barn, they're pretty good, you know? So we compare them with our other horses. So he was always one of the top horses.

This happened with Real Quiet. He only cost \$17,000. Real Quiet never really got the respect because they look at the price. This horse, he was by Protonico, who was a good horse.

You rode him?

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** I rode him, yeah.



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**BOB BAFFERT:** He was a good horse, well-bred. Didn't get the mares in this business.

But if you look, he's a beautiful horse. And he looked -- in the paddock today, he looked -- he's growing. I could tell. He's filling out now. He's starting to mature. He looked really good in the paddock. He felt good.

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** He was sharp.

**BOB BAFFERT:** He was on it. He was sharp. He walked in there like he didn't care about the other horses. That's all you can do.

My job is just get him there and give him a chance. And when he gets on there and he pushes the button, the button doesn't stick. (laughter).

And he had the horse. You're in charge. And the thing is, there wasn't really pressure on me or on him. It was nice. Mr. [Amr] Zedan, he comes in here and enjoys the day and gets a Derby experience. It was just...

But it was so exciting. I haven't been that excited in a long time. I'm telling you, it was so exciting. I don't know how you can contain yourself that last 50 yards.

**JIM MULVIHILL:** Bob, Johnny's won two in a row for you now. And there are rumors that he might move his tack to California. Are you part of that conversation? Can you talk about Johnny's success with you?

**BOB BAFFERT:** I'm not part of that conversation. But I know one thing. He's got one of the best agents, Ron Anderson. And he's got [Joel] Rosario. He's got him. And I have a lot of respect for him. I call him -- if I want to run a horse, even if he's not riding him, I'll ask him, what do you think of this spot? Am I in the wrong spot? He'll say, you're in the wrong spot.

I have feelers out there. You have to have feelers. Johnny's -- he likes it out there.

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ:** I like it out there.

**BOB BAFFERT:** Last year he bought a boat. It says Authentic on it.. He keeps it down there. I don't know. It's a little rough out there in California, that water.